

**MEDON DILUTUS (ERICHSON) (COL.: STAPHYLINIDAE) IN  
RICHMOND PARK, SURREY**

JOHN OWEN

*8 Kingsdown Road, Epsom, Surrey KT17 3PU.*

DURING 1997, a survey of beetles living underground at the roots of old trees in Richmond Park was carried out, using underground pitfall-traps as described by the author (Owen, 1997). Among the beetles present in a trap at the end of July was a specimen of *Medon dilutus*. The trap had been set in the middle of May as close as possible to the base of a large, long dead oak standing in light soil among bracken in an otherwise open area (OS grid reference TQ 211735) and had last been inspected at the end of June. The trap was left in position for a further 12 weeks. By the end of 1997, traps had been set at the roots of 18 old oaks in various parts of the park, including six in the enclosed Sidmouth Wood. The total effort amounted to 240 trap-weeks but only the one example of *M. dilutus* was obtained.

As stated by Allen (1996), there have been only three reports of *M. dilutus* being taken previously in Britain, the last more than 90 years ago. The first of these is given by Fowler (1888) who refers to a specimen taken by Sharp at Cairn Water, Solway on 22.iv.1869 and now in the Natural History Museum, London. It turns out, however, that the specimen is, in fact, an example of *M. ripicola* (Kraatz) (Hammond, *pers. comm.*). The next report concerns a specimen taken by Collins in Tubney Wood, Berkshire on 20.xi.1899 and reported by Joy (1904). This specimen was recently traced to Reading Museum and has proved to be a genuine example of *M. dilutus*. The third report refers to a specimen taken in Frame Wood, Hampshire on 13.vii.1907 and reported by the captor (Walker, 1907) but efforts to locate this specimen for examination have not been successful in spite of many enquiries.

Beare (1901) reported sweeping a specimen of *Medon castaneus* (Gravenhorst) in Richmond Park, the only example of the species to have been recorded from the Park. This is a species which could be confused with *M. dilutus*. I have, however, examined the specimen, now in the Royal Scottish Museum, Edinburgh, and found it to have been correctly identified.

Overseas, *M. dilutus* is distributed throughout the western half of Europe, reaching from southern Sweden to southern Italy. It inhabits also, partly in the form of cave-dwelling subspecies, the Mediterranean region, including the north coast of Africa, some of the Mediterranean islands and the Canary Isles (Bordoni, 1982; Coiffait, 1984). In northern and central Europe, *M. dilutus* occurs among old oaks in parks, sometimes associated with nests of animals such as moles or foxes (Sainte-Claire Deville, 1935; Horion, 1965; Koch, 1989). In keeping with this, Richmond Park is a large deer park with many ancient oaks. There was no evidence of animal inhabitation immediately by the tree where the Richmond Park specimen was taken though there are rabbit burrows at the roots of old trees within a short distance. A recent visit to Frame Wood revealed that it still holds many old oaks with little evidence that it has changed much since Walker took his specimens in 1907, or

indeed for many years before this. It was never enclosed and, accordingly, not subjected to silviculture. Tubbs (1986) provides a relatively recent photograph of the site. Contemporary accounts indicate that Tubney Wood at the time of Collin's specimen was similarly a wood with many old oaks and, though it is now somewhat fragmented and partly developed, it still has a few old trees.

It would be interesting to know why Joy (1932) did not include *M. dilutus* in his handbook of British beetles having seen and identified Collin's specimen. Whatever the reason, the existence of at least two confirmed specimens puts the British status of this beetle beyond further question. It is readily distinguished from other members of the genus occurring in Britain by its size (4.5 - 5 mm) and by having a uniformly punctured pronotal disc without a smooth central line. With Joy's key (*loc. cit.*), *dilutus* runs down to either *ripicola* or *fuscus* (couplets 20 - 22), from which it is distinguished by its uniformly punctured pronotal disc. With Fowler's key (*loc. cit.*), the identification of *dilutus* would seem quite straightforward.

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